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THE NEWS LETTER

DEC 20 1947

OF THE COLLEGE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

Durham, N. C.

Vol. IX - No. 8 | BROOKLYN COLLEGE — BROOKLYN 10, NEW YORK | November, 1947

Meeting of The New England Section Held Oct. 17 and 18

A meeting of the New England Section was held at Northeastern University, Boston, on October 17 and 18. The program has already been published in the NEWS LETTER.

A panel discussion of "The Objectives of Teaching Composition at the College Level" indicated that the four speakers were in general agreement that the student should learn to write idiomatic, socially acceptable, and effective English; and that in order to write he must be given, as foundation, good reading and thinking habits. Marcel Kessel (University of Connecticut) stressed the importance of making the student easily articulate in the expression of his experience before disciplining him in correcness. Sydney R. MacLean (Mount Holyoke College) felt that the variety of reading materials now used in the freshman course often left the teaching of English itself vague and undefined. Walter L. Simmons (Rhode Island State College) outlined the present experiment at his college: a sharp division between the teaching of (1) basic composition in laboratory and (2) critical readings and writing based upon critical problems. George M. Sneath (Boston University) felt that with the short term and large classes, discipline in correct writing must be primary, but he agreed with Dr. Simmons that training in ideas and literary judgment must then follow in the composition course.

An acute and amusing paper, "Aesthetic Judgment" by F. Cudworth Flint (Dartmouth College) dramatically indicated the paradoxes of his subject and the irreconcilable differences of opinion regarding the quality and values of two poems used for illustration.

Theodore Spencer read a paper on "The Importance of General Education in the Humanities," which is discussed elsewhere in this issue.

A "Colloquy on Thoreau's WALDEN, and on How to Teach It" will be summarized in a later issue of the NEWS LETTER.

A General Business Meeting concluded the convention.

In preparing the program, the Committee was guided by certain principles previously agreed on. The meetings were made as informal as possible, permitting participation by the audience. Topics of general interest were discussed, and as much time as was feasible was allotted for each part of the program, so that there should be no sense of hurry or of running on a schedule. Since the place of meeting was near restaurants, no formal luncheon or dinner was held, members eating wherever they pleased.

The panel discussions consisted of short, informal talks by the participant, conversation by the participants with one another, and questions and comments from the audience. The advantages of this type of discussion were clear: variety of personality and opinion; liveliness of presentation; informality; and inclusion of the audience, with the opportunity for challenge, disagreement, and presentation of new points of view that this affords. The contributions of members of the audience were many and valuable.

R. M. G.

ANNUAL MEETING -- DETROIT

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1947

The Annual Meeting of the College English Association will be a dinner meeting. The cost will be the cost of the dinner and the use of the room: $4.00.

— Speakers —

Gordon K. Chalmers, President, Kenyon College
Odell Shepard, President, College English Assoc.

MINDING OUR OWN BUSINESS

Brisk discussion is expected to follow these two major statements on the position on English studies in the American college.

Send reservations to Leo Kirschbaum, Department of English, Wayne University, Detroit, Michigan.

Regional Meetings

Va., W. Va., N. Carolina

10:00 A.M.

Registration: Presser Hall

10:30 A.M.

Morning Session: Presser Hall

Harry K. Russell, University of North Carolina, presiding.

James Sledd, Duke University: "Some Old Suggestions for a New Freshman Course."

E. C. McClintock, Jr., University of Virginia, opening the discussion.

1:00 P.M.

Luncheon: The Banquet Hall, Randolph-Macon

Robert T. Fitzhugh, Executive Secretary, The College English Association.

Randolph W. Church, State Librarian of Virginia: "The Virginia State Library as a Research Center."

2:25 P.M.

Business Session: Presser Hall

3:00 P.M.

Afternoon Session: Presser Hall

John P. Kirby, Randolph-Macon Woman's College, presiding.

Cleanth Brooks, Yale University: "The 'New Criticism' and the Teaching of Literature."

Arthur Kyle Davis, University of Virginia, opening the discussion.

Further news of this meeting will appear in later issues.

COUNTER BLAST

Dear Editor,

A few years ago when I was editor of this Palladium of Progress and directed other affairs of the CEA, I reproduced for the edification and moral improvement of our membership an extract from Hollinshed's Chronicles,—a panegyric on distilled liquor, or "aqua vitae," in which its many virtues were extolled; but ending up with the worthy sentiment, "Indeed it be a sovereign remedy if it can be orderly taken."

That fragment was set into type by the late William Goudy, master of the typographic art, and copies were distributed to our members at one of our annual get-togethers. Incidentally, I still have a considerable quantity of those sheets stowed away and should be glad to mail them while they last to any of our members. Ten cents seems too large a charge to cover the expense and five cents too small; so

(Continued on page 3)

Prof. Spencer On "General Education In The Humanities"

At the recent meeting of the New England Section of the College English Association, held at Northeastern University in Boston, on October 17 and 18, Professor Theodore Spencer of Harvard University read a paper on "The Importance of General Education in the Humanities."

In his introductory remarks, Professor Spencer cited Mr. Erich Fromm's recent book, **Escape From Freedom**, as typical of much of our thinking on modern cultural problems. Eloquent in its declaration that democracy must "imbue people with . . . the faith in life and in truth, and in freedom as the active and spontaneous realization of the individual self," the book fails to define what such affirmations really mean. Man, continued Professor Spencer, if we judge by the most successful civilizations of the past, must see himself in relation to a god or the forces which he believes control his destiny, a society in which he can find a definite place, and a moral order which makes his own actions seem right or wrong. Man needs to "look in three directions—upward, around, and within." Such writers as Mr. Fromm, failing to recognize these relationships, offer only vague solutions for our problems.

Can general education in the humanities, asked Professor Spencer, offer more positive, more specific help to our situation? But first of all, what does "general education in the humanities" mean, and why is it important?

The term, continued Professor Professor Spencer, re-emphasizes "a very old problem, the problem of how to make wise human beings." He quoted the well-known passage from Newman, "Quarry the granite rock with razors . . ." to underline the difficulty of the problem, and went on to equate general education, as he uses the term, with what Newman, in the **Idea of a University**, calls liberal knowledge, the aim of which is the acquiring of "the philosophical habit" of mind.

General education in the humanities, Professor Spencer declared, should concentrate on "those great texts of the past" the authors of which illustrate "the philosophical habit" Newman describes. Such

(Continued on Page 5)

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Theodore Spencer, Harvard Univ. (1950)
Mark Van Doren, Columbia Univ. (1950)
Membership in the College English Association, including THE NEWS LETTER, $2.00 a year. Subscription for Libraries, $1.50.

Freshman Composition Dropped

One of the most sensible recent statements about the use of language was made by an amateur, Maury Maverick:

"A man's language is a very important part of his conduct. He should be held morally responsible for his words just as he is accountable for his other acts. Let us be orderly in our language and brief. Slovenly disorder in speech and writing is not only a reflection upon the person's thinking, but an insult to the person to whom it is sent."

The first sentence of this paragraph is inscribed in block letters in the preceptorial corridor [at Colgate]. Probably like most mottoes it will tarnish with time, but it ought to be enough to get along with for a while. We had already put our brand on this one, in dropping required freshman composition and asking the whole Faculty to insist that students talk and write clearly in all their work. We are all amateurs, and may do no worse than the professional teachers of composition. Our present theory is that most of the freshman class can, if they will, write and talk acceptably. As preceptors, meeting them individually, we are in an unique position to refuse to be insulted. We are not formal teachers of composition. Our job, along with the rest of the Faculty, is to make the freshman care enough to take the necessary pains.

A sampling of the first reports warrants the old SNAFU comment. That is to say, the papers are on a par with most first papers in a freshman composition course. A fair number say nothing at all, some contain thought but do not reveal it with precision or interest, and many show a blithe disregard of usages not only customary but good.

The temptation is strong to sally in with red pencil and passionately excise every offending apostrophe and each forlorn preposition. This should probably be done at some point in the battle, but may not be the best initial tactic. The first concern is with what the student has to say. If you have read the paper in advance you will be prepared to comment, either on material or technique. In dealing with the latter it is often more effective to discuss three or four typical weaknesses than to try to cover everything all at once.

Colgate University
Preceptorial Studies
Series II, No. 6

Protest Without Bias

As one of the 2.9% of English Ph.D.'s who have left the teaching profession temporarily, I should like to protest mildly and presumably without bias against W. L. Werner's letter in the September **News Letter.** Mr. Werner has discovered two facts: that " . . . of 1381 English doctors graduated in the decade of 1930-40, only 2.9% were found in non-academic employment in September, 1940;" and that this percentage is lower than that for any other department, and compares with an average for all departments of 27%. These facts are interesting and significant, and I am grateful to Mr. Werner for calling them to my attention. I am disturbed, however, by his curiously narrow and torturous inferences. They suggest a lack of self-respect, or at least an apologetic defensiveness and soreness of mind, deplorable in teachers.

"One plausable deduction from these statistics," thinks Mr. Werner, "is that our method of training does not prepare graduates to compete for jobs off the campus . . . (and does) not make them socially and economically desirable." Certainly my friends and teachers in the graduate school at Berkeley did not think that we were preparing doctoral dissertations as credentials for jobs with U. S. Steel. Indeed, it comes as a novel idea to me that anyone could evaluate the doctoral training in English as preparation for commercial or industrial jobs. Some matters are incommensurable. The little joke about social and economic desirability is irrelevant of course, since it applies equally to all teachers—even teachers of useful things like engineering and business correspondence—and assumes that all are teaching only because they could find nothing else. It has the same validity as the old saw, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." Judging from the current cry for teachers (including teachers with Ph.D.'s in English), I should conclude that they are socially and economically desirable even—and perhaps especially—when they are not competing for jobs off the campus.

The quoted strictures would have more relevance if they applied to holders of the B.A. in English, though even undergraduates do not often select English as a major for the cash value of the diploma. Still, the later success in non-vocational education, may after careful analysis be shown to reflect on the content and presentation of the English curriculum. But to judge the Ph.D. by his success, or his mere employment, in an unrelated field - - ! For the field can scarcely be other than unrelated. I can think of only two non-academic occupations for which a Ph.D. in English is direct preparation: lexicography, and certain specialized types of editing and criticism. Even these activities, in all probability, would be undertaken concurrently with an academic appointment. In any other occupation, the holder of a Ph.D. would be wasting years of intensive study and specialized training—a luxury which few of us can afford and fewer would choose.

That is not to say that Ph.D.'s are unfit for non-academic work. (Again, I take issue with Mr. Werner, who seems to think that at present only the maverick " . . . 2.9% of our English doctors would be fit to make their way in the great world beyond the book-stacks." A pathetic picture, that of the other 97.1% innocently presenting their Ph.D. diplomas at industrial offices, failing abjectly at "socially and economically desirable" jobs in the great world, and eventually retreating behind their sheltering wall of books.) English teachers proved as pliable and adaptable as anyone else during the recent war. One instance from my own experience will illustrate the point. On examining the personnel files of the men in the division which I headed of an elaborate post-hostilities study of the Japanese war economy, I was amused to find that three of the men in addition to myself had Ph.D.'s in English. One, for example, was directing preparation an evaluation of the Japanese consturction industry during the war. All three of these men have returned to their academic jobs by choice, despite non - academic opportunities for which they had demonstrated their fitness. For many men, I am confident, the doctorate affords an intellectual discipline whose value is not confined to the subject-matter on which it is developed. For many others, unfortunately, the Ph.D. stimulates no more self-development than does an escalator.

There is much that is wrong with the training of the Ph.D. in English. But the defects of the curriculum should be judged by the ends proper to it: the fostering of independent literary scholarship and appreciation, and preparation of competent college teachers. To the dismaying extent that our Ph.D.'s do not adorn these functions, the methods of training require revitalizing. But that the Ph.D. program does not specifically train men to be junior college journalism instuctors, teachers of engineering English, or advertising executives shows only that the graduate schools are sticking to their proper business. The one who needs to mend his ways is the college administrator who, for prestige, hires as teacher of journalism and technical report-writing a Ph.D. with emphasis on Elizabethan drama. (The plight of that young Ph.D. is a separate topic, and one which personal feeling disqualifies me from discussing.) When the Ph.D. curriculum is reformed, it should not be to satisfy the junior college dean.

It is tempting to wish for a greater outside market for our products. Before we succumb to temptation, we should at least consult with those other devotees of knowledge for its own sake, the physical scientists. They have found recently an insatiable and well-paying market for pure basic research; possibly they have found also that the market has bought them as well as their products. Better pay for teachers and scholars in the universities, and more support outside for creative scholarship and historical criticism are desirable goals; they must not be confused with or compromised by the no doubt equally desirable goals of more prestige and more varied careers for Ph.D.'s.

For purifying reforms of the Ph.D. training in English, is essential: self-respect first of all, and respect for literary scholarship and esthetic appreciation. If these and other humane and non-convertible values are by many people held in low esteem because of their slight value, our reasoned adherence to their integrity is the more important. The disinterested pursuit of knowledge and the enjoyment of the arts are aspects of civilized living which we should champion for themselves, not for their standard in a Gallup poll. That society finds no place for them save the university and the leisure hours of dilettantes (another word that has unjustly fallen into low esteem) does not diminish their value. Statistics and votes do not measure such matters.

Name withheld by request

"Work In Progress"

Beginning in March, 1948, "Work in Progress" (formerly sponsored by the Modern Humanities Research Association) will reappear under a new name, RESEARCH IN PROGRESS, edited by the Secretary of the Modern Language Association of America with the assistance of Mr. Robert Sawyer of New York University. RESEARCH IN PROGRESS will be issued to all members in a special Supplement to PMLA, containing also the annual American Bibliography. The annual Proceedings and List of Members will hereafter be issued as a separate Supplement.

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I've Been Reading

Members are invited to contribute reviews of books, old or new, for the reviews and the attention of other English teachers. Professor J. Gordon Eaker, the Assistant Editor, is charge of I'VE BEEN READING. He is Head, Department of English, Jersey City Junior College, Jersey City, New Jersey.

The Trollope Reader, selected and edited by Esther Cloudman Dunn and Marion E. Dodd, New York: Oxford University Press, 1947, 430 pp., $3.75.

* * * *

This little volume with selections from forty-nine of Trollopes's works is surprisingly readable. The excerpts have been arranged under four headings: "Trollope looks at life," "He considers its patterns," "He distills its ideas and theories," "He visits the United States." The last grouping is particular entertaining with his description of Washington, D. C., as a "ragged, unfinished collection of unbuilt broad streets, as to the completion of which there can now, I imagine, be but little hope." You understand why Trollope is currently popular when you read what he says about plumbers whose "bill is of all our torments the most regular, bearing a proportion to our rent which we should have regarded as formidable had we anticipated the necessity of these periodical visits."

J. G. E.

Two Hundred Poems by Ricardo Quintana, Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1947, xxxii 393 pp., $2.50.

* * * *

The key to Professor Quintana's purpose and his principle of selection is given by the title of his introductory essay, "Poetry and the Everyday Reader." Leaving for experienced readers of poetry such large questions as the nature of the creative experience and such technical matters as metrics, Professor Quintana attempts to suggest "an attitude, a manner of approach" to poetry for the "everyday reader." He counsels this reader to concentrate on the poem itself and to consider it as "an art object" which is rhythmic and which "discloses a situation." The brief and general nature of his eminently sound advice will appeal to the instructor who wants to chart his own course, though it may seem insufficient to one who tries to learn to read poetry without further guidance. The selections themselves are, with few exceptions, the most familiar and best-loved classics of English poetry. One concurs with all the inclusions and only mildly wonders at the exclusion of Chaucer and Byron. The final section, which includes selections from two Americans, Frost and Macleish, contains a generous though necessarily highly selective group of twentieth century poems.

Exposition: Technical and Popular, by Jay Reid Gould and Sterling P. Olmstead, Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 126 pp., $1.75.

* * * *

This recent addition to the list of textbooks on exposition is, according to the preface, "intended primarily for the student who may someday have to write on the professional level as a specialist in his field." In this respect the book differs from the usual college text on exposition. However, the discussion of the means to this practical end forces out much of the traditional detailed analysis of the various types of exposition. Especially in the section on the research article the authors' concern with the differences between the student and the professional researcher produces wise observations and sage advice, obviously based on painful experience, rather than a detailed outline of method. Popular exposition of technical subjects is discussed in a brief final section, where again principles and some practical hints replace detailed analysis.

John K. Reeves
Skidmore College

Counter Blast

(Continued from Page 1)

I will send two copies on receipt of one dime, to cover cost of postage, envelope and mailing.

But the purpose of this communication is not to make a sale! Some time after the issuance of that souvenir, my attention was called to a copy of the first edition of King James' "Counterblast" against tobacco and it occurred to me that it would be consistent to follow up that first reprint with a second, aimed at those among our members who are slaves of the filthy weed. The fact that I may be included among their number is beside the mark, for I am old and sinful, and younger members may still be saved. So I reproduced two pages from that first edition in simple electrotype on zinc, but never made use of it because soon afterward I passed my responsibilities along to you.

I am shipping the plate to you under separate cover. Perhaps you will see fit to reproduce it in some issue of the News Letter if you find yourself short of communications from our membership on less weighty topics. Surely King James addressing teachers on the use of tobacco, even so long after his death, may render a greater service than some assistant professor of English who addresses them upon the misuse of the subjunctive.

Before closing may I say that I read with great interest Robert Gay's account of the beginnings of the CEA. Men tend to grow sentimental as they get older, which in part accounts for his tributes to the undersigned. The true story of the birth of CEA may never be spread out in cold type. Birth pangs are not something to talk about in light fashion, or exposed to the world. But I may add to Bob Gay's account the suggestion that that particular birth was not an easy one and actually was brought about by Caesarean operation, with Bob as the chief surgeon and I but a humble assistant.

Respectfully yours,
Burges Johnson
1101 Oxford Place
Schenectady, N. Y.

SEE PAGE FOUR

Leonard S. Brown

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BOOK NOTE

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iudgement, and complexion, haue bene at laſt forced to take it alſo without deſire, partly becauſe they were aſhamed to ſeeme ſingular, (like the two Philoſophers that were forced to duck themſelues in that raine water, and ſo become fooles aſwell as the reſt of the people) and partly, to be as one that was content to eate Garlicke (which hee did not loue) that he might not be troubled with the ſmell of it, in the breath of his fellowes. And is it not a great vanitie, that a man cannot heartily welcome his friend now, but ſtraight they muſt bee in hand with *Tobacco*? No it is become in place of a cure, a point of good fellowſhip, and he that will refuſe to take a pipe of *Tobacco* among his fellowes, (though by his owne election he would rather ſeele the ſauour of a Sinke) is accounted peeuiſh and no good company, euen as they doe with tippeling in the cold Eaſterne Countries. Yea the Miſtreſſe cannot in a more manerly kinde, entertaine her ſeruant, then by giuing him out of her faire hand a pipe of *Tobacco*. But herein is not onely a great vanitie, but a great contempt of Gods good giftes, that the ſweeteneſſe of mans breath, being a good gift of God, ſhould be wilfully corrupted by this ſtinking ſmoke, wherein I muſt confeſſe, it hath too ſtrong a vertue: and ſo that which is an ornament of nature, and can neither by any artifice be at the firſt acquired, nor once loſt, be recouered againe, ſhall be filthily corrupted with an incurable ſtinke, which vile qualitie is as directly contrary to that wrong opinion which

which is holden of the wholeſomneſſe thereof, as the venime of putrifaction is contrary to the vertue Preſeruatiue.

Moreouer, which is a great iniquitie, and againſt all humanitie, the husband ſhall not bee aſhamed, to reduce thereby his delicate, wholeſome, and cleane complexioned wife, to that extremitie, that either ſhee muſt alſo corrupt her ſweete breath therewith, or elſe reſolue to liue in a perpetuall ſtinking torment.

Haue you not reaſon then to bee aſhamed, and to forbeare this filthie noueltie, ſo baſely grounded, ſo fooliſhly receiued, and ſo groſſely miſtaken in the right vſe thereof? In your abuſe thereof ſinning againſt God, harming your ſelues both in perſons and goods, and raking alſo thereby the markes and notes of vanitie vpon you: by the cuſtome thereof making your ſelues to be wondered at by all forraine ciuil Nations, and by all ſtrangers that come among you, to be ſcorned and contemned. A cuſtome lothſome to the eye, hatefull to the Noſe, harmefull to the braine, daungerous to the Lungs, and in the blacke ſtinking fume thereof, neereſt reſembling the horrible Stigian ſmoke of the pit that is bottomeleſſe.

The final two pages of King James's "A Counter Blaste to Tobacco." Imprinted at London by R. B., Anno 1604. Reproduced by courtesy of The New York Public Library, from the first edition of "Counter Blaste," in the Arents Tobacco Collection; and with the friendly approval of Mr. George Arents.

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SCRIBNER'S

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It goes without saying that some rather specific study of words and phrases falls within the program of every course in the college English curriculum. What then should be the content and the purpose of the half-year course in **English Language** suggested by the CEA committee as part of the approved academic program in English? The committee hinted that something like 'Words and Their Ways' would be appropriate.

The phrase used bears the glamour of an excellent, useful, and long popular book prepared under the aegis of two distinguished scholars. It suggests also a way of considering words that is highly agreeable to many people. They like to think of words as a kind of mythic ententies that enjoy an existence of their own and possess rather esoteric powers of accumulating 'meanings' and of imposing these curious accretions upon speakers and writers and readers. That such a view of words opens up an interesting and amusing pursuit is obvious. The use of it as the pattern of a college course is, however, open to question. In the first place, the intellectual route to which it leads is the highway of the dilettante. He who travels the road acquaints himself with a variety of linguistic facts mixed with highly colored folk tales—all interesting, but of no particular significance. It all amounts to the kind of stuff that makes a fetching radio program or a titillating newspaper feature. The knowledge purveyed involves no suggestion of the knower's linguistic function or his responsibility. This lack alone implies a fatal objection to the erection of the pursuit into the status of an academic course.

In making this comment, one does not blink the fact that a course planned on the 'ways of words' theme may well prove highly popular and entertaining. It might even lend itself to a bit of painless indoctrination. The student should acquire a fascinating agility in a kind of linguistic mythology. He should have at command for examination a choice collection of examples of the protean shapes of meaning that these mythic entities called words achieve. And a highly diverting series of class meetings can be fashioned out of this material. As gay and gambolling a futility as ever masqueraded under the academic sun. Indeed, this very mythology should be employed as a piquant sauce to any serious course in language. Something of the kind is a quite necessary concession to the weakness of human nature in student and in teacher, particularly when the two face each other. The sauce may not, however, be taken for the meal.

The saving grace of this 'ways of words' course is, obviously, that it is concerned with meanings. So much can hardly be said for the pursuit of etymology through a college semester. And yet a program operating under the title of **Etymology** enjoys certain choice advantages. The very word bears the aroma of a long and apparently honorable tradition. Etymology, with its familiar apparatus of roots and stems and affixes, is an ancient and altogether classic sport. There is no doubt that out of it a right tight little single semester program can be carpentered. Moreover, the instructor may be quite sure that he will meet with scant or no sceptical resistance from students. They will be more than ready to call the course by its official title, with no ellipses. Indeed, they are prone to dub any course in language with the title. Practically all of them will come well steeped in the popular notion that knowledge of the derivation of a word is the master key to the meaning and the appropriate use of it. And several vivacious misses will be ecstatically happy to exclaim, "Oh yes, that's from the Latin (or Greek)," deliciously sure that they have spoken the last word and thoroughly clarified the immediate problem of meaning. They are not to be blamed for these illusions. They have been brought up that way. Nobody has told them that, in real life, words, like trees, are to be judged by their fruits and not by their roots.

The whole drift of the vital program for college English runs counter to the continued use of the dilettante antiquanianism of "words and their ways' and to the superficial busy-work of etymology for any respectable semester in English Language. What college students need, somewhere along the way, is a vigorous initiation into modes of intelligent thinking about the nature of language and about the responsibilities attending their use of it. This proposition is sound for students in the humanities and rather more than less valid for those in the sciences and in engineering. Not the **ways of words,** but **the ways of men with words!**

Charles H. Dawson
Roanoke College
Salem, Va.

William Jewell Jr. Group

Professor Franklyn T. Walker, Acting Head, Department of English, William Jewell College, Liberty, Missouri, writes: "We organized the English Club, drawing up a constitution stipulating that the members would be affiliated with the CEA, and pay as part of yearly dues to the local club, $1.00 a year to your organization for nine issues of **The News Letter** . . . After November 11th meeting, I will send you names and addresses of those who pay up. I think we will have two or three dozen . . .

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Professor Spencer

(Continued from Page 1)

authors as Plato, Aeschylus, Homer, Dante, Shakepeare or Tolstoi, if they are to be the subject of a **general,** not a special, education, should be read for the light they throw on the force or forces which move man, the society in which he lives, the inner moral order of which he is aware.

The speaker outlined the aims Professor I. A. Richards recently set up for his general education course in Homer, the Old Testament and Plato. Professor Richards' aim is to make students wonder about such questions as: "What Homer, the Old Testament and Plato may have had to do with General Education in the past for good **and ill,**" or "which among our current notions we would have to suspend in order to understand, at all fully, these remote old authors." Calling wonder somewhat too static an attitude of mind, Professor Spencer added that "the study of a great master of emotion and experience should help us to order and arrange our own emotions and our own expression, so as to make them more effective active instruments." Such studies should help men to add to the four freedoms a fifth: freedom, not from anything, but for responsibility.

One of the most important functions general education in the humanities can serve, Professor Spencer went on to show, is to rid us of our arrogant contempt for the past, and to free us of a provincialism, not of space, but of time. "If men and women are aware only of their own environment, they obviously lack other environments, other vicarious experiences, to refer to; being without precedent, they tend to be without values." General education should also help us to discipline our tendency to be over-practical, concerned with the usefulness of things in a short-sighted way. And finally, to state in a sentence what Professor Spencer illustrated so wittily and devastatingly by analyzing a nation-wide advertisement, general education may make us aware of the danger that modern methods of mass communication and modern advertising "may popularize all value into meaninglessness" by abusing once dignified symbols until their significance has been lost.

Professor Spencer held, further, that general education can help to educate "the future masters of expression, the future writers and artists" by keeping alive the common and traditional symbolic language of our culture. Familiarity with such a language would help bridge the gap that has widened "between the serious creator and his audience" and ultimately would prepare the way for the recreation of symbolic language.

Of another claim for general education in the future Professor Spencer spoke only in qualified terms, when he indicated the role it might play in laying the foundation of an international culture. While insisting that "the business of general education . . . is with the present, . . . with the microcosm rather than the macrocosm," he suggested that: "General education can help to keep alive the elements in western culture which may become a part of an international culture in that day, however far off, when the human imagination is powerful enough to achieve it."

In conclusion, Professor Spencer asked a series of challenging and difficult questions concerning the relation of general education to democracy. "Can it be used for everyone? Should we try to create in the minds of **all** our citizens the 'philosophical habit' of which Newman speaks? Is is possible, is it even desirable, to do so?" In suggesting to these questions, he distinguished between "the opportunity for excellence" which should in a democracy be open to all, and the capacity for excellence which is not universal. If democracy is not to appeal to a Lowest Common Denominator of ability then, he concluded, we must help create an elite, or in Arnold Toynbee's phrase, a creative minority, a minority whose privileges would be the inner privileges of the mind, and which would be "a beginning of the fulfillment of what democracy dreams about: a society where there is no such thing as the common man, where everyone is **uncommon,** and no one is excluded from partnership in excellence."

In the spirited discussion that followed the talk, questions such as these were raised:

What, specifically, do you mean by the "values" to be found in the great books? Suppose the values implicit in one book are different from those in another? What is the function of the teacher in moving, say, from Dante's **Divine Comedy** to Marx's **Capital?** Does a common tradition emerge from a study of a great texts?

How does a general education help men to solve contemporary problems? Is it by relating the past to the present through making the student aware of perennial questions, such as, for example, the conflict between the individual and the state in the **Antigone** or in the **Crito?**

Is your conception of general education really what Newman meant by liberal education? Didn't Newman limit the function of literature more than you have, turning to religion as the true discipline of "the passion and the pride of man?"

In suggesting answers to these questions, which typify those being asked wherever general education and the great books are being taught or discussed, the speaker stressed his belief that, even though one may be uncertain or hesitant in judging the relative truth of one author's interpretation of experience as against another's to enter into the mind and imaginative world of a great writer is to experience an illumination and expansion of consciousness, so that the vantage point from which one sees human problems is higher and more all-embracing.

The references to Newman's **Idea of a University** in both the talk and the discussion period lead one to ask whether some of the aims of "general education in the humanities" are not open to the very charge of vagueness about values and standards that Professor Spencer deplored in his introductory remarks. Of the nine discourses that constitute Newman's **Idea of a University,** all but three treat liberal knowledge in relation to religion and theology, whereas Professor Spencer only touched upon the question of religious truth. Yet even here it must be said that by restoring the great texts to the curriculum, and by considering them in the way Professor Spencer suggests, we cannot help raising some of the classical problems of theology and philosophy. In so doing we may prepare the way for a revival of these studies in the universities.

Professor Spencer's remarks on the role general education may play in laying the foundation of an international culture were brief and qualified. These comments might have been developed in a more positive fashion. There is desperate need for the cultivation in American universities of a sense for universal human issues. If we are not to entertain vague or sentimental notions of brotherhood that are blind to the divergencies of national and cultural history, we need to accustom ourselves and our students to moving freely across the boundaries of nations and of languages. If, for example, in our own attempts to institute these programs of general education we were collaborating with scholars working out similar programs in European universities, the mutual benefit and the increase of mutual understanding might be great.

Professor Spencer's address challenged any college English teacher to examine the program in his own institution and to ask whether it can meet such tests as Professor Spencer suggested for a contemporary general education. It was clear from the way the talk was received that most of those present were alive to the need for reconsidering the relation between what goes on in English Departments and what kind of individuals ultimately emerge from our colleges.

Nov. 6, 1947.

Alvan Ryan
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